



Prairie Dog

Cynomys ludovicianus

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Prairie dogs are native to grassy plains of North America. The black-tailed prairie dog is the species most commonly kept as a pet in the US. They tend to be active during the day. Adults weight 1.5 to 2.5lb or more. Prairie dogs can live 5-10 years. To lift a prairie dog wrap one hand around the chest while supporting the hind quarters with your other hand. Keep your hands behind the prairie dog's head as they may bite when upset.

Husbandry concerns: Prairie dogs are social animals and can be housed together, however not all individuals get along and introductions often go better when both animals are young. Adult males may fight if they are not neutered. Prairie dogs need well ventilated cages. Wire sided cages work best. The bottom of the cage should have 2 inches of soft bedding for the prairie dog to stand on. Wire grate or hard cage bottoms can lead to foot problems. Paper based bedding works best. Avoid cedar and pine bedding as the strong smell and oils in the wood can be irritating. Bedding should be changed twice a week. Prairie dogs should be kept at 68-78F. Prairie dogs are often avid chewers. Providing cardboard for them to chew can be good enrichment for them and decrease chewing at cage bars, however wood or other hard materials should be avoided as gnawing it may cause tooth damage.

Behavior: As they mature, prairie dogs can become more aggressive and difficult to handle. Frequent handling helps to keep them tame. Neutered or spayed animals may be less aggressive and have less of an odor.

Teeth trims: Teeth trims should only be done by a veterinarian, as serious harm can be done if they are not performed correctly. Most prairie dogs, on a good diet, do not need their teeth trimmed, unless their teeth are not well aligned. Those that do will probably always need periodic trims.

Nail trims: Many prairie dogs need periodic nail trims. This can be done by a veterinarian, if they are uncooperative at home. Watch out for the "quick", the sensitive part of the nail with nerves and blood vessels. This can be tricky with dark nails.

Diet: Obesity is a common problem in prairie dogs. Their natural diet is mostly grasses. Prairie dogs

More on the back!

should always have access to as much grass hay as they want to eat. Alfalfa hay is too high in calcium for prairie dogs and can predispose them to bladder stones. Pellet diets are usually alfalfa based, too high calorie and do not wear down teeth properly. Prairie dogs do not need to be fed any pellets, but can be given up a tablespoon of pellet feed per day. If you need help converting your prairie dog from a pelleted diet to hay, please talk to your veterinarian. Fresh veggies make good treats, most other things are too high in calories. Guinea pigs should always have access to clean water. Sipper bottles need to be cleaned regularly with a pipe cleaner to prevent them from clogging. Having more than one sipper bottle is a good idea incase one gets clogged between cleanings.

Health care: Prairie dogs can be very good at hiding illness. We recommend exams every 6 months to make sure your pet is healthy. Weighing your pet at home can be a good way to catch illnesses early. Please bring them in to see us if their weight changes by 10%, or more. Neutering or spaying your prairie dog may help prevent behavior issues and reproductive cancers. Dental disease is very common in prairie dogs, primarily from trauma due to chewing cage bars or other hard materials.

Reproduction: Prairie dogs reach sexual maturity at 2-3 years old. Gestation is 30-35 days. Babies are weaned at 6-7 weeks.

